

# Chinese Culture as Manifested in the Opening Ceremony of the 2008 Beijing Olympics

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Lecture given at University of Massachusetts

On Aug 8 and Oct 28, 2008

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### Topics

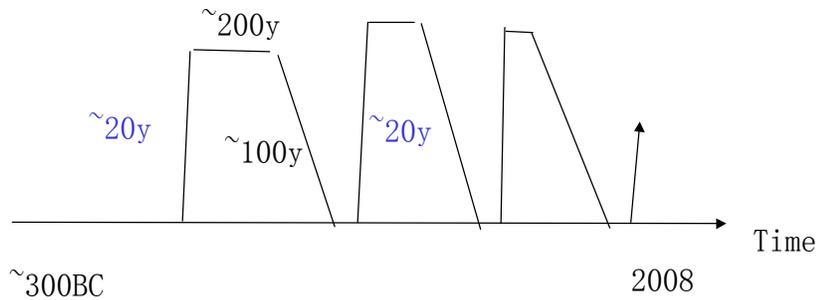
- Li (decorum) Yue (ritual, music) and Li vs He (harmony)
- Confucius's ideal society
- World wide tsunami
- Chinese paintings and poems
- Ancient inventions, trading and explorations
- Revisit the meaning of He
- Chinese economy and its role
- Conclusions

### By whom at what time

- Duke of Chou  
~ 11<sup>th</sup> Century BC
- Confucius ~ 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC
- Present
- Five Dynasties: Sui, Tang, Sung, Ming, Ching
- ~200AD to 1400AD
- Hundred School  
~ 5<sup>th</sup> Century BC
- Present

### Historical Background

For 5000 years, individual Chinese dynasties were overturned  
and new ones established  
always *with the same written language and culture.*



China, with outward confidence and  
inner conflict, forges a new identity

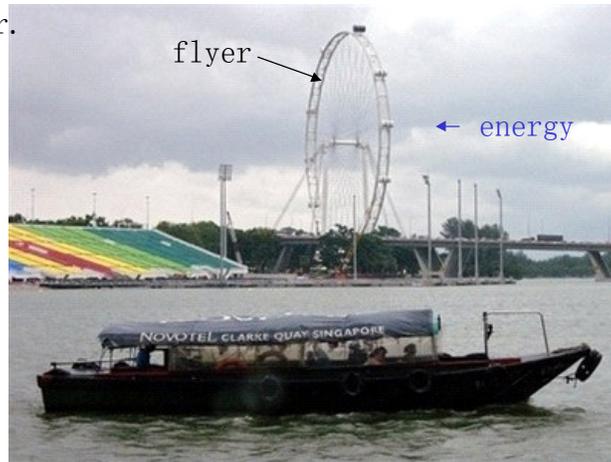


Feng Shui: Why Bird's Nest?

Beijing is called the Swallows' Capital.

Feng Shui for over-sea Chinese:

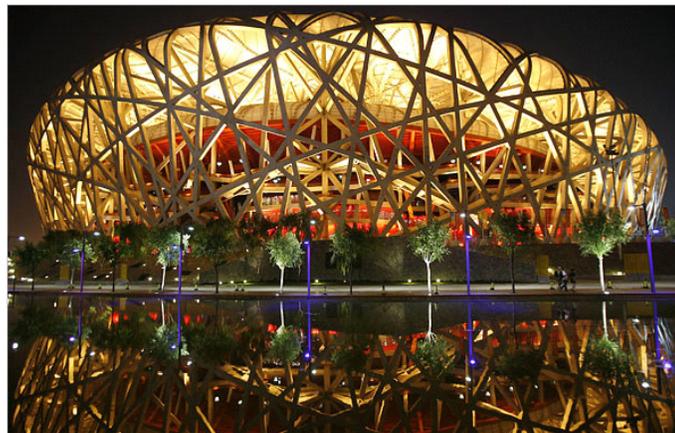
- To pick up qi (energy), turn the Singapore flyer 180 degree.
- Mandarin Oriental Boston: move the entrance 50 feet, to have a clear view toward the Charles River.



### The Bird's Nest Shows Cultural Sophistication

A gigantic surreal sculpture with

- matrix of crisscrossing bent columns and beams
- bulging asymmetrical forms
- mysteriously translucent material



### The Bird's Nest National Stadium

Hard as 42000 tons of steel  
can be made flexible, to contain the  
forces  
of a dynamical society

Meaning:

Forces tamed to become pliable to one's  
purposes

### Hospitality:

Happiness is when friends  
arriving from far away places



*Olympic rings raised to  
signify the unification of the  
continents*



Lighting Olympic torch  
“夸父追日”

**The legend of Kua Fu  
Chasing the Sun,**  
similar to the Greek legend  
of Prometheus stealing fire  
from the sun.

Exploring the Sun has been  
a dream for  
the Chinese since 4000BC

# Prof. Min Chen's Lecture at UMass, Oct. 28, 2008

2008名演员击缶而歌，欢迎来自全世界的朋友  
2008 Drummers perform rituals and music to welcome  
friends from the world by imitating sound of thunder.



3100 years ago the Duke of Chou established  
**Li**, *decorum* (social conventions) and instituted  
**Yue** (music)  
周公制**礼**作**乐**



这就是湖北曾侯乙墓出土的青铜冰鉴缶。此  
缶有夹层，夹层里面放冰，缶里面放食物饮  
料，这就是古代的小冰箱。

←Ancient double layered ice  
box-wine cooler made of  
bronze



中国礼乐文明的秩序与和谐理念

Order and harmony,  
embedded in the Chinese ritualistic and musical  
culture,  
e



***Corbel System: Tou-Kung***

Interlocking bracketing system to support  
corners of building without need for nails.



See Joseph Needham's Science and Civilization in China

## 礼 (Li) Decorum

Li is the foundation of humanism, a standard for behavior, a code of conduct.

- Distinguishes
  - humans from wild animals
  - civilization from barbarism
  - right from wrong
- Enables one to know respect and humility
- Maintains order and righteousness of a society
- Guides people towards goodness and self-discipline

## The Spirit of和(He) appreciates differences and diversity 和的精神

- Original meaning: share food with others
- Since 700BC, 和 means to exercise restraint and find the best balance, to control desire, emotion and behavior
- 和 is perfectly balanced, not right and not left
- 和 is harmony, peace
- 和 is the basic Chinese principle governing the universe (heaven, earth, human beings), society, passion, desire, wish, diet and health.
- 和 is the way for cultivating self, unifying family, governing the country and the world.

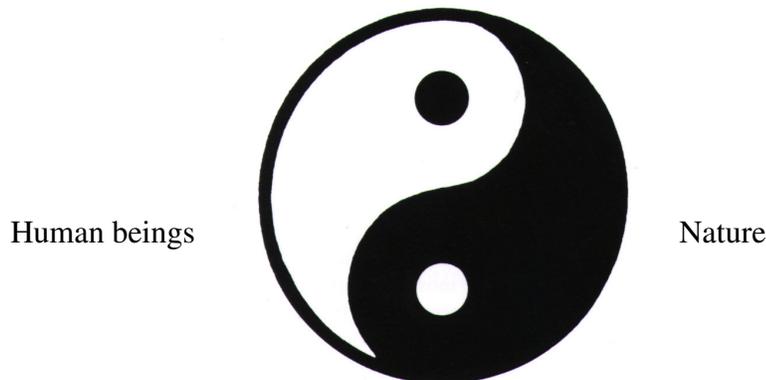
## The Spirit of **Li** and **He** “礼”及“和”的精神

**Li** is institutionalized decorum or social conventions, the foundation of humanism, a code of conduct, ethics.

**He** is the harmonious spirit that appreciates differences and diversity.

**Li** and **He** are complimentary and indispensable to each other.

Too much **Li** and too little **He**: Cold and strict  
Too much **He** and too little **Li**: Chaotic and inefficient



*The “egg of chaos” represents the opposing but complementary forces of yin and yang. Each flows into, and contains the seed of, the other.*

Spirit of He  
appreciates differences and diversity  
“和”的精神

- Yin and yang together make everything
- He 和 is the harmony of yin and yang, leading to stability and peace.
- Opposite to contradiction and cold war.

Confucius's 3000 disciples  
holding books made of bamboo, chanting,  
“Within the four seas, we are all brothers!”



## Confucius's ideal society

**IF:** 大道之行也。天下为公。选贤与能。讲信修睦。故人不独亲其亲。不独子其子。使老有所终。壮有所用。幼有所长。矜寡孤独废疾者。皆有所养。男有分。女有归。货恶其弃于地也。不必藏于己。力恶其不出于身也。不必为己

**THEN:** 是故谋闭而不兴。盗窃乱贼而不作。故外户而不闭。是谓大同。

We learn ancient culture, to apply to our present society:

## Confucius' Ideal Society

*".....the world belongs to the people. The virtuous and the capable will be elected to govern. One is true to one's word and lives with others in peace and harmony. Thus, not only one cherishes one's own family and loves one's own children, but extends considerations to others so that the elderly can live out their natural lifespan securely; the middle-aged can contribute to the society; the youth can learn and grow; the wretched, the displaced, the disabled and the sick can all receive adequate care; the men can carry out their responsibilities and the women can find suitable homes. Material goods must not be wasted and need not be accumulated only for one's private use. Individual strengths must not be left untapped and need not be used only for one's own gain.*

*Once this is achieved, there shall be no more manipulation or conspiracy, no more robbery or theft. Consequently, there shall be no need to guard entrances to one's home.*

*Such is Great Harmony."*

## Confucius's ideal society

.... the world belongs to the people. The virtuous and the capable will be elected to govern. One is true to one's word and lives with others in peace and harmony. Thus, not only one cherishes one's own family and loves one's own children, but extends considerations to others so that the elderly can live out their natural lifespan securely; the middle-aged can contribute to the society; the youth can learn and grow; the wretched, the displaced, the disabled and the sick can all receive adequate care; the men can carry out their responsibilities and the women can find suitable homes. Material goods must not be wasted and need not be accumulated only for one's private use. Individual strengths must not be left untapped and need not be used only for one's own gain.

*Digression: While China is still experimenting, America has achieved nearly all the above, but still not what was described below. Why?*

Once this is achieved, there shall be **no more manipulation or conspiracy, no more robbery or theft**. Consequently, there shall be no need to guard entrances to one's home. Such is Great Harmony (a utopia).

## *Why has America achieved 95% of "A".....*

### **A**

- **Free Election:** *The world belongs to the people and the virtuous and the capable get elected to govern.*
- **Contracts:** *One is true to one's word and lives with others in peace and harmony.*
- **Social programs, SS and Medicare:** *The elderly and the youth are taken care of; the wretched, the displaced, the disabled and the sick can receive adequate care.*
- **Loans/Insurance/training:** *Adults can contribute to the society.*
- **Market Economy:** *Material goods must not be wasted and need not be accumulated only for one's private use.*
- **Efficient job creation:** *Individual strengths must not be left untapped and need not be used only for personal gain.*

.....but not B?

**B** There shall be **no more manipulation or conspiracy, no more robbery or theft.**

Consequently, there shall be no need to guard entrances to one's home. Such is Great Harmony (a utopia).

- How has our financial tsunami flooded the world?

*Why has America achieved A but not B?*

I wrote 20 months ago:

“..... Our living standard might be drastically lowered, as

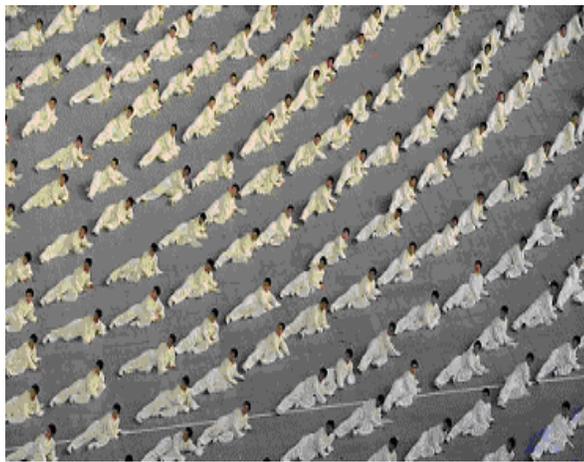
- **America's debts spin out of control**
- **Sub-prime is the straw breaks the camel's back: brokers get commission; buyers get houses without down-payment; CEOs get bonuses. Deals are insured via CDO, leveraged by derivatives to 600 trillion\$'s**
- **causing a worldwide tsunami, once in 14 billion years if random (Barrons).**

- In the last 20 months, the world has been oscillating between recession and inflation. Governments are spending trillions to banks who had just given billions of bonuses often few days before declaring bankruptcy.
- A powerful organization, e.g. Lehman or AIG, or a rich nation like the Athens, might flourish, until the majority (in power) figure out how to vote to benefit themselves, at the expense of others, including their children.

### What I would propose

- Switch my SS from Treasury to equity.
- Such reckless gambling like sub-prime can be and should be proven in open debates. The Fed/FCC/Congress, instead of just brushing the challenges aside and regretting afterwards, must provide the public with a solid analysis, which is open to challenges and debates.

Tai-chi strengthen  
joints and bones,  
cardiovascular and respiratory functions and  
one's spirit



Unfurling of a Scroll  
147m long



Dancers serve as paint brushes, creating images of mountains, rivers, villages, fishermen, trees, clouds, the Sun, etc.

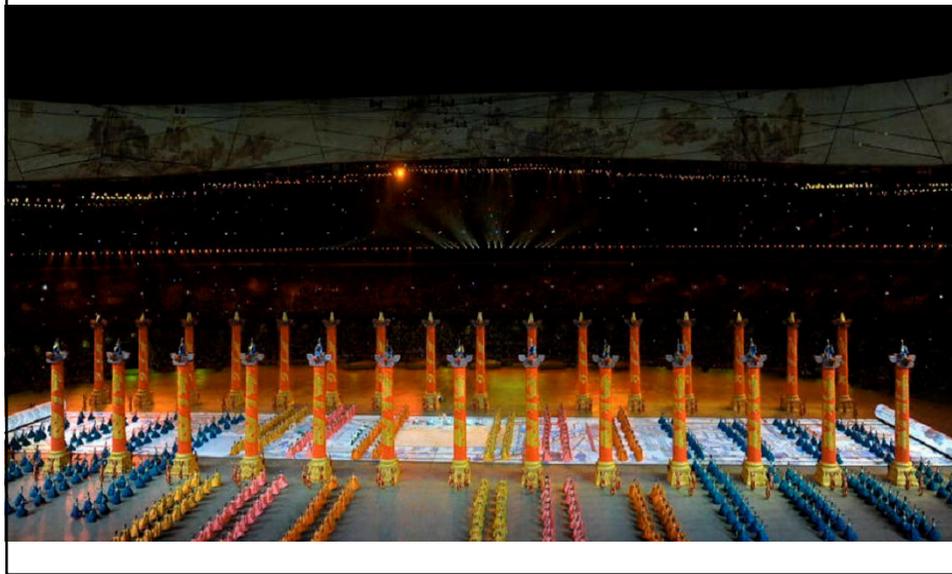
Five large ancient paintings from 700 to 1600 AD displayed art, geography, social life, architecture and other cultural elements of five dynasties.



“1000-mile of River-Mountains” 12m long 960 AD



Courtesans of various dynasties proceeded alongside pillars of royal dragons.



The magnificent Court Dance



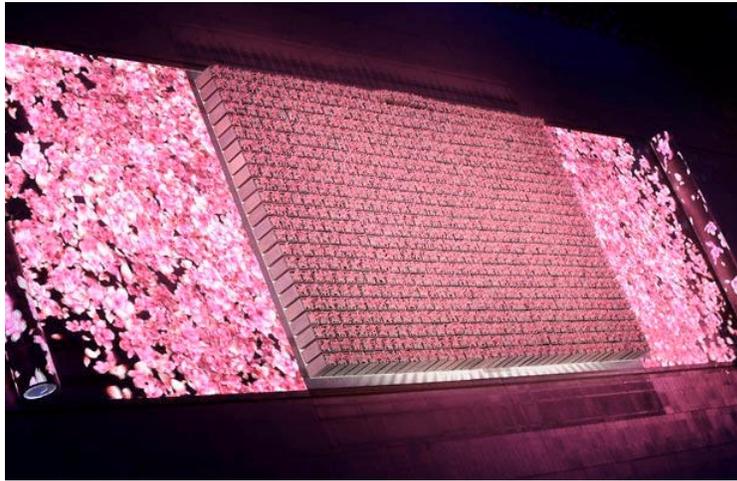


《春江花月夜》 "Moon-lit Night by a Spring River"

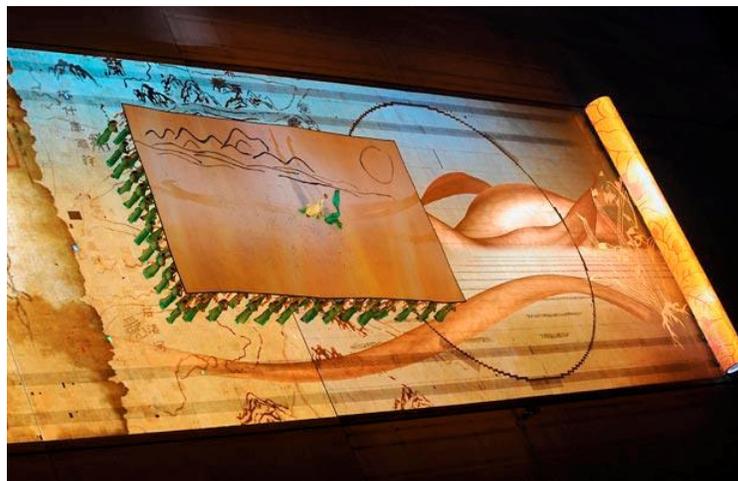
*A soft and beautiful melody played while ladies dance gracefully, depicting the glorious days of the Tang Dynasty (618-907AD).*

Ladies from various dynasties danced on giant paintings depicting their times.

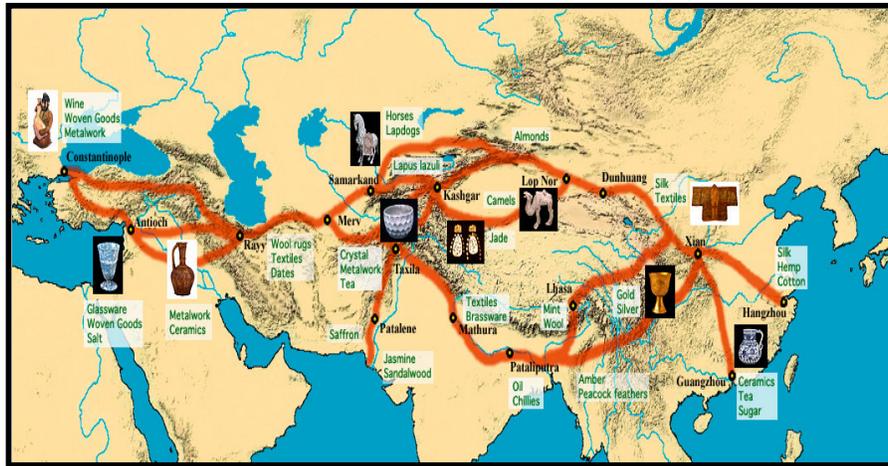




More than 15,000 performers showcased the nation's past achievements.



The "Silk Road" (200BC) performance



Trading goods along the Silk Road

## Ancient Art Treasures at Dunhuang Grottoes

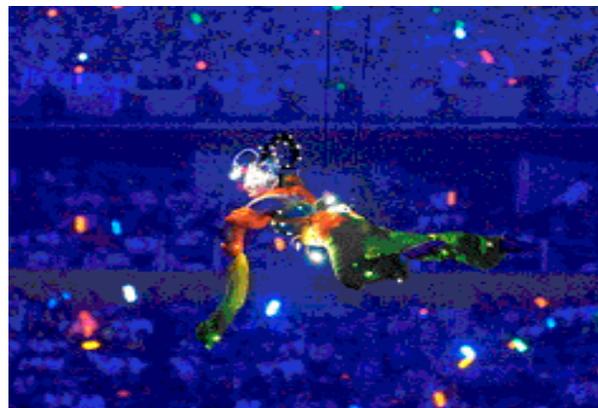
- An important stop on the Silk Road, the main trade route since the first Century B.C.
- Brightly painted statues of Buddhas and murals with painted ceilings featuring, among other things, 4500 Flying Apsaras.
- Cave temples on cliffs against a background of golden sand and clear blue sky.



Inspired by the murals at Dunhuang Grottoes, Flying Apsaras played zithers and harps, with ribbons three times the length of their bodies dancing in the air. They hovered against the wind with flower pedals fluttering about and colorful clouds twirling below.

敦煌窟中两身飞天弹古筝和弹箜篌，飞舞的巾带经身体长三倍，有飘旋的花朵，下面有彩云流转，飞天好似逆风翱翔在彩云上。

The Flying Apsaras on murals were Goddesses of Cloud and water, or Goddesses of Heavenly Songs. They danced about in the sky without a care while playing beautiful music, reflecting ancient Chinese people's longing for freedom.



Invention of Silk -> Silk Road



2700 B.C, Chinese began making silk, led by queen Lei-tzu and emperor Huang Di, by raising silk worms, spinning silk thread, and weaving of silk thread into fabric.



A dancer performed on a platform supported by many people.

书法、茶艺、太极等等体现中国文化  
Calligraphy, tea ceremony and Taichi are among the  
many manifestations of Chinese culture.



A painting of mountains (“yang”) and waters (“yin”)



A Period of China's trading history illustrated

## China's Inventions and Discoveries

“One of the greatest untold secrets of history is that the ‘modern world’ in which we live is a unique synthesis of Chinese and Western ingredients. Possibly more than half of the basic invention and discoveries upon which the ‘modern world’ rests come from China.”

Robert Temple, the author of *The Genius of China: 3000 years of science, discoveries and inventions*.



## 八大发明

丝绸、青铜、不锈钢，指南针、火药，造纸、印刷和瓷器

## Major Chinese ancient inventions

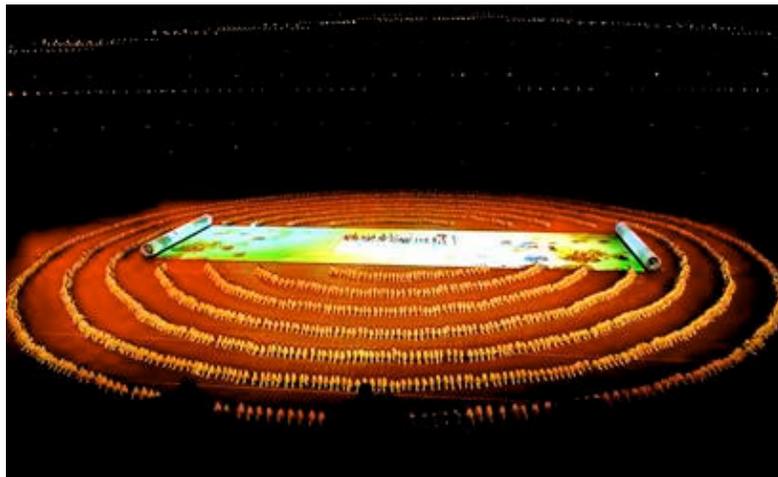
- Silk
- Bronze
- stainless steel
- Compass
- Gun powder
- Paper
- Printing 960 AD
- China

### Invention of Paper



Papermaking was officially registered in AD 105  
but paper paintings in Dunhuang were made ~100 BC

### The round heaven and the square earth



Dragons flew off the Nest.



Invention of Compass



A specific magnetic **direction finder** device is recorded in a book dated to 1042 AD.

Invention of Gunpowder - fireworks



Gunpowder first appeared from 300 to 650AD, with several recipes were written about inflammable mixtures.

Building technology: Corbel System



Interlocking bracketing system to support corners of building without need for nails.

## Printing Technique



## Invention of Movable Print Blocks



Pi Sheng, during Sung (1041-1048), invented movable print blocks, 300 years before Gutenberg.



897 Performers demonstrated the movable types.

## *Movable Types*





Assembling a Picture of a Ship

The Chinese Navy built by  
Cheng-Ho 600 hundreds years ago



Admiral Zheng He (Ming Dynasty) (1371-1433 AD)



One century before Columbus's arrival in the Americas and da Gama's in India, Zheng He traversed the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean into the Persian Gulf and Red Sea, and reaching eastern Africa. All the ships of Columbus and da Gama combined could fit in a single vessel in the fleet of Zheng He.

### The Chinese Navy Built by Cheng-Ho 1405-1411 AD

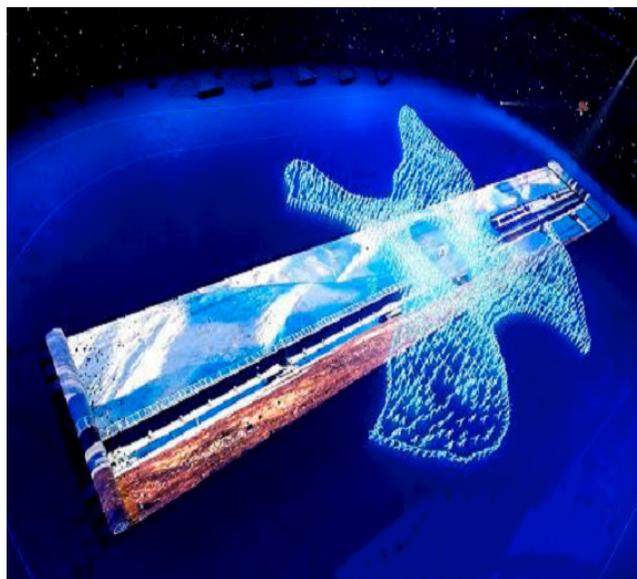
- 62 ships, 30,000 men;
- four were 400' x 160'
- Carrying thousands of tons of goods
- Compass invented in 1100AD
- Determining latitude by observing stars
- Communicating with flags, etc
- Sailing to Vietnam, Java, Malacca
- Sri Lanka and Calicut
- Helping king of Calicut





水晶和平鸽在鸟巢起飞

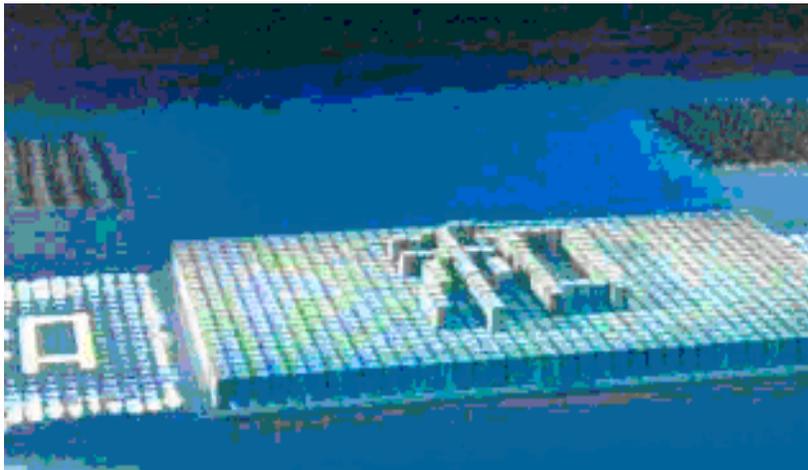
The dove of peace took flight in the Birds' Nest.



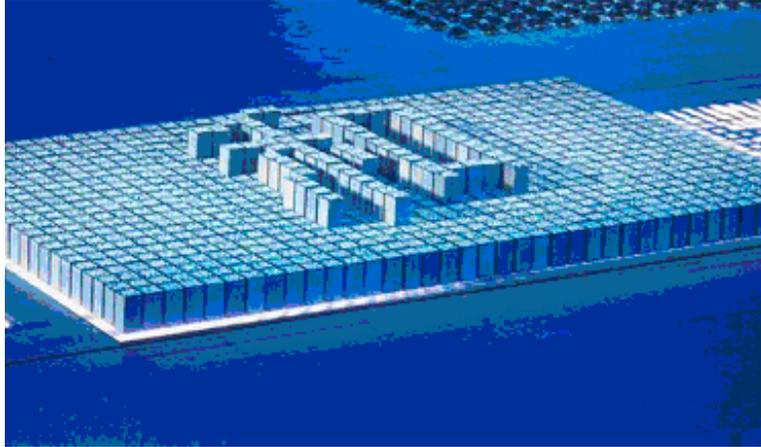
Chinese Culture and the Spirit of “He”  
(harmony, peace)  
中国文化“和”的精神



The character和 “He” (harmony, peace)  
was printed in its various forms  
from ancient to present times.



和“He” (harmony, peace)



*“Harmony is of the utmost value.”*

*“Forbearance is high virtue.”*

*“Do good deeds together with others.”*

*“A kind gentleman loves his fellowmen.”*

*“Do not cause trouble for your neighbors.”*

*“Within the four seas we are all brothers.”*

*“Do not do unto others what you do not wish them to do unto you.”*

*“In the balancing of energies arises harmony.”*

*“Achieve balance among heaven, earth and humans as well as between*

*“Yin” and “Yang” in order to reach the highest level of harmony.”*

These statements of belief have been held for hundreds and thousands of years, shaping the national character of the Chinese people into one of peace-loving and harmony-pursuing. Chinese culture is characterized by its love of peace, generosity, open-mindedness, maturity and mellowness. Tolerance is perhaps the greatest quality of Chinese culture, which will one day become the quality of the world's civilization as it matures.

**He:** High Tech and ancient culture  
harmonically work together

- *RFID tickets*
- *MEMS electronic torch*
- *18000 performers wirelessly coordinated*
- *Panorama projectors*
- *258k Cree LED lamps*
- *LED scroll of 147 m x 22 m*

*Ancient culture expressed through modern high tech  
two opposing elements toiled together  
living example of the spirit of He at work.*

Hope for a Harmonious World  
~ Exploring the Solar System ~



**Fireworks exploded over Forbidden City**

The Opening Ceremony for the 2008 Beijing Olympics

*Oh, ancestors, glory is here once again  
if only to sooth the pain that you endured in the past 200 years!*



## Chinese Economy Potential

- China has 5-10% of the world's GDP, and 30% of the world's GDP growth.
- 500 million people in China are underemployed. A huge number of roads, airports, internet, and infrastructure continue to be built as income levels rise.

## Conclusions

- **Efficient:** Chinese “Liyue” culture with entrepreneurial spirit has flourished for 5000 years.
- **Integrity:** Its integral sense of cultural awareness never dissipated, nor could it be squelched.
- **Peaceful:** The Spirit of “he” in Chinese culture appreciates differences and diversity
- **Balance:** China could help to restore stability and balance in the world, leading us out of recession.